

## Whitehall chief attacks Boris over sacking of Met boss

A LEADING civil servant yesterday made an unprecedented attack on Boris Johnson.

Despite the convention that Whitehall workers remain politically neutral, Sir David Normington said he was 'shocked and disappointed' to see Metropolitan Police chief Sir Ian Blair forced out by the Tory Mayor of London.

Sir David, the senior civil servant at the Home Office, is already mired in controversy because he ordered the leak inquiry which led to police raiding the home of Tory Immigration spokesman Damian Green.

In a BBC interview yesterday, he appeared to indicate disapproval of Mr Johnson's destabilisation of the Commissioner.

Sir David recalled a meeting he and former Home Secretary Jacqui Smith had with Sir Ian, shortly after the Met chief had a crisis meeting with Mr Johnson.

Sir Ian told them he was determined to resign, which Sir David described as 'a shock and a disappointment', adding: 'We liked Ian Blair and you had to feel for the human being at the heart of this.'

Mr Johnson's deputy, Kit Malthouse, yesterday accused the mandarin of 'interfering' in policing by making the remarks.

# We can't repair potholes, workers ... the travellers

By Beth Hale

THE residents of Oak Road are used to a rather bumpy ride.

They do, after all, live next door to Europe's biggest illegal travellers' camp.

But when it comes to the potholes littering their once quiet country lane, they want to smooth things over a little.

Unfortunately, work to fix the potholes seems to have been shelved - for fear it might upset their illegally camped neighbours. Council workmen are refusing to repair the road unless they have a police escort.

The police, in turn, have refused, saying they are worried their mere presence could start a riot. Which leaves the residents of Oak Road, near Billericay, Essex, wondering just what they have to do to get a few potholes filled in. The road is a narrow grassy-banked lane serving about 35 homes, mostly bungalows, at the edge of the Crays Hill travellers' site.

Residents say it has been turned into a mass of potholes since the 1,000-strong camp was formed.

Caravans, mobile homes, four-wheel-drive vehicles and cars have steadily made the problem worse. In normal circumstances, residents

might expect a simple repair job. But when Essex County Council was urged to resolve it as a 'matter of priority', it responded with concerns for the safety of its workforce.

The council said it would fix the potholes but wanted a police escort for fear the travellers might confuse the repair team with an eviction squad. Police, however,

said sending a police escort to the road could also send sparks flying.

As a result, a few potholes have now become the subject of a 'communication strategy'.

This apparently involves leaflets being given to children at the local school to spread the warning that the potholes are due to be fixed.

Little wonder then that some villagers were last night feeling vexed.

Pam Cummins, a parish councillor, said: 'Talk about tip-toeing around people. When they fixed the road outside my house they didn't come and ask me first.'

Fellow parish councillor David McPherson-Davis said: 'The road is almost impassable for an ordinary vehicle. It's in a terrible state now and has been for four or five years. For the last year the parish



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# say council might riot



largest illegal travellers' site

council has been asking for the potholes to be filled in and it's been promises, promises, promises with no result.

He said a policeman questioned at a local meeting last week explained that travellers might think the road was being repaired in readiness for evictions and be 'up in arms'.

PC Nigel Scott said: 'If they think there is an eviction there will not just

be people from Dale Farm (the Crays Hill site) but half the site in Cambridge and half the people from Wolverhampton turning up. It could all turn very weary, very quickly.'

Chief Inspector Simon Dobinson, from Essex Police, appeared to back up this view. He said travellers needed to be fully informed before potholes were filled in.

He said it 'required a clear communication strategy to minimise the risk of any false perception by the local travellers that the works are a precursor to any enforced eviction'.

But Gratton Puxon, a spokesman for those on the campsite, said: 'I think I speak for everyone when I say the police are not needed.'

He said the families there wanted the road fixed 'as much as residents'. 'It should be done without the need for this rigmarole,' he added.

An Essex Police spokesman said an escort would not be given to workmen as a 'matter of routine'. An officer, however, could be there at the start of work to ensure the road was safely closed.

An Essex County Council spokesman insisted the road was 'no different' to any another. He said some repairs had already been carried out and more were planned. 'As is standard practice we will notify all local residents about such activities in advance,' he said.

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